

Edgumbe Presbyterian Church

Midweek Update

Oct. 16, 2019

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PRACTICING COMMUNITY

Do you know what our egos like better than anything? It is to make us feel abandoned and betrayed and alone. When we feel isolated, then our egos take over and we become trapped in our own fears and habits and spinning thoughts. The antidote to our fear and isolation is community. This is why Jesus says to his disciples as he is preparing to leave them, "If you want to be my followers, love one another."

Building healthy, loving, healing community takes time and energy. What we practice, we become. Being in community when everything is going great feels wonderful. But any conflict or disagreement often sends us back into place of fear and isolation. Such times are exactly when it is time to "practice" community. What does practice look like? The Apostle Paul spends more time addressing this issue than any other. Paul's favorite community image is that together we are the Body of Christ, where every part belongs and every member depends on each other. This is a vision of community of love and forgiveness and gentle listening and patience and humility. Take a look at 1 Corinthians 12 & 13 for the full vision.

One of the ways we get to "practice community" right now is to gather after church this Sunday to talk to each other about how we talk to each other, especially around political issues. We are not making any big decisions about what is OK or what is off limits at this church. We are not gathering to vote or take sides or shame or blame. All we are trying to do is to welcome each other with open hearts, to choose community over isolation and division, to be the Body of Christ. Do you have stories you tell yourself about what happens to community during times of dissent? This may be a good time to open yourself to a new story. At the end of this Update, you will see a Session Report from Fred and an essay on Unity from Jay that bring this conversation a little further. For myself, my heart beats a little faster when I think of this meeting on Sunday. But then I remember Jesus's invitation and let myself rest again in love for myself, for God, and for you all. I really hope to see you this weekend!

JENYA IN CONCERT

Tonight, Wednesday, October 16th Jenya will be performing a recital with soprano Jennifer Olson. For more details please look at the flyer attached to this email. The recital will be livestreamed, here is the link: <https://cla.umn.edu/music/ensembles-creative-work/watch-listen/lloyd-ultan-recital-hall>

THE NEXT TWO SUNDAYS

This Sunday is worship we will celebrate the ordination of Connie Howe-Vielmetti to the office of Elder with the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands. On October 27, we present a Bible to Aria McGregor—so this is the last week to add your prayers and blessings and favorite texts to her Bible in the narthex!!

PRAYERS

- Prayers for Dave and Connie Howe-Vielmetti as they attend the funeral of Dave's step-mother today in northern Wisconsin.
- Prayers for Leslie Snow during her chemo treatment and a recent nasal infection.
- Prayers for Phil as he starts a new class at Shakopee Prison this evening.
- Prayers for the Eggerts and their work in Tanzania.
- Prayers of healing and restraint for Fred Clary as he begins to return to work with his repaired shoulder.

OCTOBER SESSION REPORT – BY ELDER FRED CLARY

Session met on Thursday, October 10 2019. One of the important agenda items was hearing from Connie Howe-Vielmetti on her discernment towards accepting the position of ruling elder. There was a beautiful conversation and validation for Connie's spiritual maturity and place in our community. Connie has graciously accepted the request. Her ordination is slated for Sunday October 20th. Let's all welcome Connie in her role of shepherding our congregation.

The next item was a review of the tension caused by the guest speaker mentioning things of a political nature, specifically, her personal feelings on the 2016 election. A long discussion of over an hour with session ensued. There are many philosophical and political views at our church. Our church, although unique for its acceptance and openness, must tread lightly on subjects that could be divisive among good loving people of Christ. In the Spirit of making all feel welcome at EPC and removing divisive labels, a special meeting will be held Sunday, October 20th after church. If you can't make it, please email or contact the Pastors or Elders to have your voices heard.

The Session also decided to begin to approach several regular attenders of EPC on the subject of official church membership, with the goal of having a New Member's Exploration class in the near future.

UNITY – AN ESSAY BY ELDER JAY MCGREGOR

On a recent visit to my hometown, I was staying with my brother. Within minutes of my arrival, he began cooking me elk and fried potatoes. He caught me off guard when he began talking about strong political beliefs, beliefs that he and I don't share. The respect that I have for my brother and the value that I put on our relationship, enabled me to listen fully to what he was saying. I found myself looking for common ground and points that we could agree upon. The bottom line was that the love I hold for my brother, and our relationship, was more important to me than whether or not we had the same political beliefs. What if this were my starting point within all my difficult conversations? I envision a community that is able to hold difficult conversations while remaining firmly grounded by how highly we value our community and our relationships with each other. It clearly starts with me taking responsibility for my thoughts and words.

When I gave a message at church in August, one of my biases surfaced. I was attempting to describe the shift in perspective that was brought about by my realization that all things came to be through Christ. I used the example that President Trump was in Christ. I immediately regretted saying it because it included, in a side-ways manner my judgements toward the President. I'm sorry.

On October 6th, our guest speaker Autumn's message was overflowing with her experience of a loving community. She also shared her experience with people in her life that were deeply affected by the last election. It was understandable why those for whom the experience of the last election was positive, would have strong reactions to her talk. I have come to my own understanding of why Autumn's message, which I believe she intended to reflect her own experience of meaningful and nurturing community, had attached to it, divisive and hurtful connotations. I use the word attached purposefully. I would also like to attempt to name that which did the attaching, and it clearly wasn't Autumn or those who saw the election as positive. We are inundated with the language of division. Language that includes labels to attach to those with whom we disagree. We are being told that we are divided, that our differences are greater than that which unites us. These labels, once we adopt them, blind us to the truth that we are part of one body.

The good news is that we can pause to recognize those thoughts which include labels. When we do pause, a space is created within us, a space within which we have the opportunity to return to the truth of who we are; children of God, created for love. If our starting point is the truth, the truth that we are family, then we are compelled to value our relationships far more than the defense of our beliefs. We can have difficult conversations. We can grow together.

As our Edgumbe Church family continues to explore community, we will have many opportunities to listen to each other with generosity, patience, and humility. On this adventure we will encounter all the difficulty and complexity that is part of being humans. We are family. We love each other and we don't always agree and we love each other. We start with love and we return to love!